

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 SNM-02 AID-05 DEAE-00 TRSE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 327

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 2192

FOR ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY LUERS FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR CO
SUBJECT: HELICOL SERVICES CONTRACT

REF: STATE 049045 AND 050348

1. IN TWO BRIEF CABLES (REFTELS) THE DEPT HAS IN EFFECT SET THE STAGE FOR THE CANCELLATION OF OUR LARGEST NARCOTICS ASSISTANCE PROJECT IN COLOMBIA. BEFORE WE PLAY OUT THE LAST ACT HERE, I WOULD LIKE TO BE SURE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN BRIEFED ON WHAT IS TAKING PLACE.

2. IN A FEW WORDS, THE BACKGROUND IS THIS: AFTER THE NEGOTIATION AND SIGNING OF THE \$3.7 MILLION PROJECT AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE NARCOTICS AIRWING, THE GOC BALKED AT ASSUMING LIABILITY FOR THE HELICOPTERS, ASKED US TO ACCEPT INSURANCE CHARGES AND SUGGESTED A DIRECT CONTRACT BETWEEN THE GOC AND HELICOL FOR THE OPERATION OF THE HELICOPTERS. IN A MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE ON FEB 8, THE AMBASSADOR EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS STATING THAT THE USG COULD NOT CONCUR IN A SWITCH OF THE HELICOL CONTRACT TO THE GOC NOR IN USG FINANCING OF THE INSURANCE. THIS MEETING, HOWEVER, PRODUCED NO CHANGE IN THE GOC
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POSITION AND IT WAS SUBSEQUENTLY REAFFIRMED BY THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE IN A LETTER OF FEBRUARY 26 TO THE AMBASSADOR (BOGOTA 2078). IN THAT LETTER, THE MINISTER EXPLAINED THAT THE COST OF LIABILITY INSURANCE FOR THE HELICOPTERS, AND ALSO FOR THE FIXED WING AIRCRAFT INVOLVED, WOULD TOTAL \$44,731 FOR THE FIRST YEAR. WE INFORMED THE DEPT THAT THE AMBASSADOR WAS

GOING TO MEEDT AGAIN WITH THE MINISTER ON THIS SUBJECT AND REQUESTED GUIDANCE FOR THAT SESSION. WE HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN TOLD TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS SET FORTH IN REFTELS. THIS WILL LEAD TO A FORMALIZING OF THE STALEMATE, SINCE THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE WILL ALTER THE POSITION HE HAS ADOPTED ON THE INSURANCE QUESTION.

3. WE HERE SHARE THE DEPT'S CONCERN, AND PERHAPS ITS IRRITATION, OVER THE GOC POSITION IN THIS MATTER. BASICALLY, IT STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT COLOMBIANS STILL CONCEIVE OF NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AS ESSENTIALLY A US PROBLEM AND FEEL THAT IT IS NO MORE THAN RIGHT THAT THE USG BEAR THE COSTS FOR EFFORTS AIMED AT REMEDYING THE PROBLEM. WE HAVE OF COURSE UNDERTAKEN SOME SPEDIFIC PROJECTS HERE IN WHICH COLOMBIANS HAVE EVIDENCED CONSIDERABLE SELF-INTEREST BUT UNFORTUNATELY THE AIR WING PROJECT IS NOT ONE OF THEM. AS YOU WILL RECALL, IT REPRESENTS IN THEIR EYES AN ENORMOUS COME-DOWN FROM THE GRANDIOSE (AND UNREALISTIC) \$30 TO \$50 MILLION PROGRAM FOR A "WAR" ON NARCOTICS THAT THEY PROPOSED TO US LAST YEAR. THUS, THE GOC AUTHORITIES WE HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH HAVE SHOWN NO IMPATIENCE OVER DELAYS IN TAKING POSSESSION OF THE THREE HELICOPTERS AND IN GETTING THE AIRWING PROJECT GOING. YOU WILL PERHAPS RECALL THAT IN EARLIER EXCHANGES THE COLOMBIANS HAVE SHOWN THEMSELVES ALL TOO READY TO ACCUSE THE USG OF "HAGGLING" AND TO CHARGE SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY THAT THE US BUREAUCRACY IS NOT FULFILLING THE COMMITMENTS MADE

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BY PRES. FORD TO PRES. LOPEZ DURING THE 1975 STATE VISIT. WHEN THE AMBASSADOR TELLS THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AT HIS NEXT MEETING, IN ACCORDANCE WITH REFTELS, THAT THE GOC "MANEUVER" ON INSURANCE COSTS WILL NOT WORK AND THAT THE PROJECT CANNOT GO FORWARD, HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY ENERGIZE THE GOC PROCLIVITIES AND IDEAS. WE CAN ULTIMATELY EXPECT A SHARPLY NEGATIVE GOC REACTION THAT MAY WELL INFECT OTHER ASPECTS OF OUR NARCOTICS COOPERATION AND PROBABLY OUR BILATERAL POLITICAL RELATIONS AS WELL. OUR "REFUSAL" TO PAY THE \$44,000 INSURANCE COSTS WILL CERTAINLY COME TO THE COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT'S ATTENTION, AND, AS YOU MAY HAVE SEEN FROM OTHER CABLES, THE EMBASSY'S RELATIONS WITH THE PALACE ARE ALREADY TROUBLED ENOUGH. FOR THIS REASON WE THINK IT ESSENTIAL THAT THE AMBASSADOR ALSO MEET WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE SITUATION IS CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD AT A HIGH POLITICAL LEVEL AND TO TRY TO LIMIT SOMEHOW ITS ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES IN OUR RELATIONS.

4. I RECOGNIZE THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE INSTEAD TO LET THE STALEMATE DRAG ON; HOWEVER, WE DO NOT SEE ANY PROSPECT OF A CHANGE IN THE GOC ATTITUDE (ESPECIALLY FOR THE REASONS CITED IN PARA THREE) AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE USG IS MEANWHILE BEING CHARGE \$9,000 A MONTH FOR THE STORAGE OF THE THREE HELICOPTERS THAT WERE PURCHASED FOR COLOMBIA. I FEEL THEREFORE THAT RATHER THAN INCUR FURTHER COSTS OF THIS AND OTHER TYPES WITHOUT PROSPECT OF A SOLUTION, IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO TERMINATE THE PROJECT AGREEMENT.

5. THUS THE DEPT'S LATEST TWO CABLES HAVE BROUGHT US TO A THRESHOLD WITH THE PROSPECT OF A VERY ROUGH ROAD AHEAD. BEFORE PROCEEDING I WANT TO BE CERTAIN THAT OUR LATEST INSTRUCTIONS REFLECT CAREFUL CONSIDERATION IN WASHINGTON OF THE SITUATION HERE AND THAT APPROPRIATE HIGH LEVELS OF THE USG ARE AWARE OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE INSTRUCTIONS.
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Message Attributes

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Control Number: n/a
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Sent Date: 08-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
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